

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Easter, April 20, 2014

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 199, 189, 193, 191, 201:1-2.

Lessons: Job 19:23-27, 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, Luke 24:1-12.

Sermon Text: Matthew 28:1-8.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Put yourself in the place of these women approaching the tomb. The most influential person in your life has died. He didn't deserve that death. He died like the worst of criminals with outrageous mockery. He died in severe agony and some most unusual things just happened. Matthew tells us what happened at the moment of his death. *"At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.* (Matthew 27:51-53)

And you didn't even have time to give him a decent burial. A couple of men quickly buried him, on Friday before the Sabbath began, but his body wasn't carefully cared for after his death the way you want to honor someone whom you love. So when you can, you go to the grave, the tomb carved into the rock where he was buried. But his body is not in the tomb.

HE HAS RISEN!

- 1. Jesus' body is not in the grave!**
- 2. An angel speaks words of joy.**

As friends of Jesus, really, as more than friends, as followers who believed in what he was doing, you want to do something for him. You really want to take decent care of his body, like we do for loved ones. It is the least you could do after he was treated so shamefully by the leaders of the Jews and the people of Jerusalem. You didn't really understand everything he had been telling you before his death, and as time goes by, you will understand more of what he had been saying about his death and what would follow his death.

During the Sabbath the women, like God-fearing Jews of the time, remained in seclusion, that is, they rested. But at dawn on the first day of the week they are again active.

Our sermon text tells us that some of the women who were following Jesus showed up at his empty tomb early on the morning after the Sabbath. They got there as it began to dawn. Now, on the first day of the week, the day we call Sunday, they could work again, having rested since the Sabbath started. They went out to the grave to take the first steps in the process of respectfully embalming the Lord's body in accordance with Jewish custom.

Our text names only Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. This does not exclude the other women named in the other Gospels, so we can't think that the different gospel-writers contradict each other.

Their purpose was to anoint the body of their Savior and Master. So they brought the necessary supplies.

It would seem that Mary Magdalene hurried out to the grave before the other women.

You can be sure that these women had been wondering about how they could show some respect to his body, and perhaps thinking and planning for what we would say "all weekend" over the Sabbath about how they could show his dead body some respect.

Matthew's gospel gives us this chronology. God tells us ***"There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow."***

There was an earthquake. This is the first thing that happened on the morning when the Sabbath was over. Just as an earthquake was connected with Jesus' death, now an earthquake was connected with the resurrection. The women had not yet reached the grave when this earthquake occurred. An angel of the Lord came down from heaven and rolled away the stone from the door of the tomb, which he then used as a seat.

Matthew mentions only one of the angels, concentrating here on the first message about Jesus' resurrection. During the course of the morning a number of angels came to the grave to share in the joy of Christ's resurrection, as the various gospel-accounts tell us. But here only the one is mentioned.

An angel rolled back the stone that was supposed to seal his grave – and sat on it! What a triumphant gesture! It is kind of like sitting on the body of an enemy, of sitting on the one you have just conquered. And this is more than just a symbol of a victory. It is a victory. This displays and proves Jesus' victory over the grave.

This angel did not come to open the grave for Christ, but to show the empty grave to the whole world, to give absolute and undeniable evidence of the fact that the resurrection had taken place in spite of the huge stone at the door to the tomb and the seal and guards watching the tomb.

Matthew describes the angel's appearance: ***"His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow."*** What brilliance! No thunder here and now, just the brilliance of lightning. His clothes were white, white as snow. But from what Matthew tells us later, the guards put at the tomb to make sure Jesus' disciples didn't steal his body and then claim he had risen from the dead had seen what had happened, and told others. ***"While the women were on their way [to tell Jesus' disciples], some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened."*** (Matthew 28:11)

The earthquake and the appearance of an angel frightened the guards and they became as dead men – perhaps fainting. When God wants to carry out his will with regard to the salvation of mankind, no sinful man, no enemy, can resist him. The resurrection of Jesus was the seal and final proof for the full atonement gained for the whole world, and all the efforts of the Jews and of Satan to prevent this resurrection were futile.

Not only were the guards frightened, but the women were frightened when they came upon the tomb and saw the angel sitting on the stone.

How would you react at seeing an angel at dawn sitting on the grave which would turn out to be empty? Wouldn't you be afraid? Of course, and of course the women were afraid!

So the angel speaks what angels often said to humans: Fear not. Don't be afraid. ***"Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."***

"Do not be afraid." How often doesn't God have to tell us not to be afraid! It happened when Zachariah saw an angel foretelling the birth of his son, who should be called John – John the Baptist. It happened when Mary saw an angel foretelling the birth of Jesus. And it happened at Jesus' birth. "Fear not", "Don't be afraid." And God gives the message again now at the resurrection of his only-begotten Son – ***"Do not be afraid."*** Don't be afraid. In this case it was "don't be afraid because you are seeing an angel". But God tells us again and again in Holy Scriptures not to be afraid of anything, for he cares for us.

The angel tells them that they have come to the right place, and that yes, Jesus was crucified. But ***"He is not here; he has risen, just as he said."*** And we might add: how many times had he told you that he must go up to Jerusalem, suffer, and be killed, and on the third day he would rise again! Jesus himself told you this was going to happen!

Look, See. Examine the place where his dead body had been laid three days ago. He's not here. This is an empty tomb. Look at where you saw his dead body lying three days ago. He isn't here.

"Then go quickly and tell his disciples." Then rush and tell his disciples. Don't waste any time. The message is that important. What are they to tell the disciples? ***"He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."***

The angel, this messenger from God, makes his mission clear. He tells them ‘I have fulfilled my calling to do what God wanted me to do right now.’

We know from the other gospels that there were at least two angels who appeared at the tomb. John’s gospel tells us that Mary Magdalene left quickly to tell Peter and John.

“So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.” They hurried, afraid, yet filled with joy. They ran to tell the others.

These events and the words of the angel make it clear that ***“He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.”*** (Romans 4:25)

Paul in his introduction to Romans writes of the power of this resurrection: ***“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God – the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.”*** (Romans 1:1-4)

The resurrection is the Father’s “amen” to the words of the Son on the cross “it is finished”. The blood of the sacrificial Lamb was accepted by the Father as full atonement for the sins of all mankind. Christ has paid for our sins on the cross. And so God makes it clear that his resurrection is justification, is the judgment of acquittal for the world.

We read in Romans chapter 5: ***“Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man’s sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.”*** (Romans 5:16-19)

Christ has become the firstfruits of those who slept in the grave, as we read in 1 Corinthians 15:20 ***“But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”***

The message of the angel is the essence all Gospel-preaching.

It is an admonition not to fear, just as the angels had said at the birth of Christ to the shepherds.

The message of the Gospel is one that must banish all terror of sin and death from the heart, and fill it with holy joy in the Lord. Jesus indeed had been crucified, but he has risen, as he had told them time and again he would. They had learned this from the Old Testament prophecies and Jesus himself had told them repeatedly. The place where the Lord had lain was in front of them, but his body had been released from the bonds of death. He had conquered death. Now they should not delay, but go at once with this glorious news to the disciples, reminding them of the Lord’s promise on the same night in which he was betrayed: ***“But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”*** (Matthew 26:32)

Christ lives. He lives for your benefit. May this message, which has again been told to you today give joy to your hearts and encouragement to your lives and hope for your death. Amen.